

## Regionally Aligned Forces: Business *Not* as Usual

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**ABSTRACT:** Few understand the rationale or components of the Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) concept. This article describes the concept and addresses its chief criticisms, namely, how it will account for diverse ground force requirements, how it relates to the Army's force structure, and its affordability.

The term Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) is widely familiar today; however, few understand the basic elements of the concept, or the goals the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), General Raymond T. Odierno, wants to achieve with it. Officers in HQDA have been on the road communicating the RAF concept to as broad an audience as possible. But the concept has drawn its share of skeptics. The most common questions fall into three broad categories: 1) Regional alignment for what? What are the ground force requirements for today? What is the real demand? 2) Isn't this just a way for the Army to justify force structure? Is the Army really doing anything differently? 3) Is the RAF even affordable? Won't it "collapse under its own weight" due to our extraordinary fiscal challenges? This article addresses each of these broad questions and presents the basic concept and rationale for RAF.

### Why RAF?

At its core, RAF is the CSA's initiative for aligning Army capabilities to an expanded set of requirements for the Joint Force—post-2014. As General Odierno stated at the Association of United States Army Eisenhower Dinner in October 2012, we will leverage the Army's mission command capability by "organizing our missions around highly trained squads and platoons—the foundation for our company, battalion, and brigade combat teams—for specific mission sets and regional conditions." This "*regional alignment of forces*" will not only offer combatant commanders access to the full range of capabilities resident in the Army today, it will "provide maximum flexibility and agility to national security decision-makers."<sup>1</sup>

RAF is a critical first step in operationalizing the concept of "Strategic Landpower," which is the combination of land, human, and cyber activities that make decisive outcomes more likely, and increases

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1 General Raymond T. Odierno, "Regionally Aligned forces: A New Model for Building Partnerships," *Army Live*, March 22, 2012, <http://armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2012/03/aligned-forces/>; General Raymond T. Odierno, *CSA's Strategic Intent*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.army.mil/article/95729/>

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options for preventing and containing conflict.<sup>2</sup> RAF is integral to the Army vision of being “Globally Responsive and Regionally Engaged” and it is fundamental to our ability to “Prevent, Shape and Win” across the globe. It is essential to the US defense strategy and represents the Army’s commitment to provide culturally attuned, scalable, mission-prepared capabilities in a changing strategic environment characterized by combinations of nontraditional and traditional threats.

Army Regionally Aligned Forces are defined as 1) those units *assigned* to or *allocated* to combatant commands, and 2) those service-retained capabilities *aligned* with combatant commands and prepared by the Army for regional missions. They are drawn from the Total Force, which includes the Active Army, the Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve. They consist of organizations and capabilities that are: forward stationed; operating in a combatant command area of responsibility; supporting (or ready to support) combatant commands through reach-back capabilities from outside the area of responsibility. They conduct operational missions, bilateral and multilateral military exercises, and theater security cooperation activities. RAF specifically addresses those requirements that are enduring in nature for the combatant commander, from “set-the-theater” to the most-likely contingencies. Accomplishing such regional missions requires an understanding of the cultures, geography, languages, and militaries of the countries where RAF are most likely to be employed, as well as expertise in how to impart military knowledge and skills to others. Hence, much of the Army is and remains aligned by virtue of assignment or allocation to a combatant commander.

In contrast, Global Response Forces (GRFs) are the designated Joint GRF that maintains a 24/7 global mission to deploy anywhere in the world within 18 hours, as well as the other service retained units that are required to stay intact and at a high states of readiness. The Army will also provide a strategic forcible-entry package, as well as some of the other capabilities that are low density but required for the initial weeks of a limited or no-notice high intensity contingency operation.<sup>3</sup>

The RAF concept provides numerous benefits. Strategically, it offers the United States both influence in and access to host nations through enhanced trust and understanding facilitated by enduring engagements. Operationally, it enables better integration between conventional Army forces and special operating forces, as well as between the Army and interagency partners, specifically the Department of State and Country Teams.

In a sense, RAF means “forces—military and nonmilitary—with not only the ability to destroy but also the decisive ability to understand the population within the context of the operational environment and then take meaningful action to influence human behavior toward achieving

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2 Additionally, the Army’s fiscal year 2013 Strategic Planning Guidance says the future force will provide regionally aligned, mission tailored forces scalable in size from squad to corps. Its personnel are to be empowered by technology and training to execute operations under the concept of mission command, underpinned by trust, flexibility, and proficiency. The operating force will, thus, comprise forces both regionally aligned in support of combatant command and those maintaining a global orientation for specific contingency missions. Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Army Strategic Planning Guidance*, 2013, 6.

3 Brigadier General Charles Flynn and Major Joshua Richardson, “Joint Operational Access and the Global Response Force, Redefining Readiness,” *Military Review*, July-August 2013.

the desired outcome.<sup>24</sup> At the tactical level, RAF drives cultural and regional expertise and language awareness training giving US forces an improved understanding of the operational environment. As a result, combatant commands receive units better prepared to work in specific theaters and better able to gain situational understanding when deployed anywhere, even to a region to which they are not aligned. It also fosters an expeditionary mindset for an Army that is more CONUS-based than ever, while also affording a greater degree of mission predictability and stability.

For nearly a decade, the Army had to respond to combatant command requirements, outside Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, with personnel from the Total Force who were sometimes minimally prepared. As we reduce our commitment to Afghanistan and United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), regional alignment will improve the Army's ability to generate strategically, operationally, and tactically relevant forces for the geographic combatant commands on a broader basis.

With the recent availability of forces returning from the CENTCOM area of responsibility and the Army's commitment to provide whatever the geographic combatant commands request, the demand for Army forces is both significant and diverse. This demand appears in the increased requirements registered in the FY14-19 Program Objective Memorandum. The activities range from military police assistance in Africa to an increase in State Partnership activities in South America, to preparing the American contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Reaction Force, to returning Pacific Command's aligned forces to its most likely contingency operations.

Currently, America's Army has more than 158,000 soldiers deployed or assigned overseas, with a substantial number engaged in stability operations in Afghanistan or executing missions in Korea, Kosovo, the Sinai, Guantanamo, the Horn of Africa, Honduras, and other locations around the globe. Even after the drawdown in Afghanistan, on any given day the Army will typically have at least 100,000 soldiers forward deployed. Land forces will continue to be the most engaged and employed of the Joint team, and through constant engagement and assessing the effectiveness of activities on the ground among humans, will be well positioned to continue to evolve direct and indirect options for the use of the military instrument for policymakers.

### **Regional Alignment for What?**

The Defense Strategic Guidance of 2012 defined a new strategic direction for the Department of Defense, assigning the Joint Force the mission of addressing myriad complex threats in uncertain operational environments. The Army will not be sized for the types of operations it conducted in the last decade. The defense guidance further directed a rebalance to the Asia-Pacific Theater, while also giving high priority to the Middle East and to other partners and friends around the world. It directed that the Joint Force must be capable of performing 11 primary missions, but left it to the services to determine how:

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4 Charles L. Cleveland and Stewart T. Farris, "Toward Strategic Landpower," *Army Magazine*, July 2013, 22.

- Counterterrorism and irregular warfare
- Deter and defeat aggression
- Project power despite anti-access/area denial challenges
- Counter weapons of mass destruction
- Operate effectively in cyberspace
- Operate effectively in space
- Maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent
- Defend the homeland and provide support to civil authorities
- Provide a stabilizing presence
- Conduct stability and counterinsurgency operations
- Conduct humanitarian, disaster relief, and other operations

The defense guidance clearly implied that the “old ways” of conducting these missions were no longer suitable, either operationally or fiscally. Most of us agree the present era is one of persistent conflict and instability. The strategic and operational environments are driving the United States and its allies and friends toward an emphasis on “shaping missions” in unstable regions in addition to preparing for existential threats. We anticipate an expanding range of smaller, shorter, rapidly changing missions. These new requirements are compelling the Joint Force and the Army toward superior agility; expanded expeditionary capabilities; precise lethality; enhanced cultural awareness and people savvy; as well as a better ability to integrate with special operations forces and other agencies. Importantly, the concept of partnering with other countries and building the capacity of others is both inherent and explicit in this new paradigm.

The bottom line is the Army, as part of the joint force and in conjunction with foreign partners, must respond to the requirements of the combatant commanders which are those the defense guidance missions outlined. At the same time, it must ensure it can mass to conduct any high-end combat mission anywhere. Accordingly, the evolution of the RAF concept has been grounded in a number of critical principles driven by the operational and fiscal environment, defense guidance, and as expressed by the CSA:

- The Army, together with the Marines and the United States Special Operations Command, will continue to develop the concept of Strategic Landpower.
- The Army will remain capable of fighting and winning major combat operations.
- While maintaining a modular, brigade-centric structure, the Army will increase its agility through leader development at all levels, and world-class training, to include enhanced Combat Training Center rotations for as many brigades as possible.
- The reduction of forces will be conducted in a way that does not break faith with soldiers and Army civilians and their families and that maintains the most ready force possible to meet Combatant

Commander needs.

- Tough choices will have to be made regarding roles of Active and Reserve components in accordance with defense missions, but the Reserve Component will remain an essential part of the Total Army.
- With the redistribution of United States forces stationed overseas, the Army will be almost entirely based in the continental United States for the first time in many generations.

Embracing these principles will help offset the turbulence of today's strategic environment and underpin the development and execution of Regionally Aligned Forces. Over the past decade, the Army conducted both combat and counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to retain the knowledge and skills gained in those conflicts, and yet prepare for the broader range of requirements of the future environment under severe fiscal constraints. This is an incredible challenge, yet the current operating environment demands it.

### **Is the Army Really Doing Anything Differently?**

Regional alignment is a fundamentally different orientation for the Army. As the Army further defines the concept of Strategic Landpower, RAF begins to provide for, organize, man, train, and equip operations and activities in the land, human, and cyber "domains." Rather than coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan to focus on training as the Army sees fit, our first priority is to understand the requirements of geographic combatant commands and to prepare forces for those activities. In addition to its decisive action training, an aligned unit is now preparing with an eye to the region to which it is focused. More forces will be assigned, allocated, and service-retained-combatant-commander-aligned than ever before for nonwartime missions: this is unprecedented for the Army. And, significantly, every geographic combatant command will have at least one brigade, as well as a division or corps headquarters with all the capabilities it provides.

Does this justify force structure? Certainly. These requirements, which will be dispersed with potentially degraded readiness over time, are both real and in addition to those associated with major contingency operations. But RAF is most centrally about an Army that is committed to meeting geographic combatant command needs, thereby retaining and refining its relevance in a changing operational environment.

### **RAF in Execution**

#### *Alignment of Service*

Retained forces will provide unit training and education focus (predictable preparation), and these units will be the first called on if a combatant commander needs more personnel and capabilities than assigned or allocated forces can provide (predictable sourcing). Habitual alignment (lasting longer than one Army Force Generation [ARFORGEN] cycle) will occur at Echelon above Brigade (corps and division levels) and we are considering all options in the Global Force Management Implementation Guidance for FY15. Full habitual alignment will likely be achieved in FY17. While it is desirable to maintain habitual alignment at brigade combat team level, the realities of current

defense missions makes this aspirational rather than practicable. As a result, service-retained, combatant-command-aligned forces will rotate annually in accordance with the ARFORGEN process. Alignment is occurring under United States Army Forces Command's FY13/14 Mission Alignment Order (MAO). The FY15 MAO will increase global alignments, made possible largely because of the drawdown in Central Command's area of responsibility.

- **Corps.** For FY13, I Corps is assigned to Pacific Command, III Corps is allocated to Central Command, and the XVIII Airborne Corps is Service retained but aligned to the Global Response Force. These alignments will endure. Formalizing the relationship between corps and ASCCs and tethered brigade combat teams is subject to ongoing work from US Army Training and Doctrine Command.
- **Division.** Active component division HQs with their separate brigades will be habitually aligned to provide at least one Joint Force-capable HQ to each combatant command. This is perhaps the most important capability the Army is providing to geographic combatant commands, as it can access a full range of capabilities from planning to specific enablers. It is also capable of scaling to provide mission command for missions of various sizes, tailoring as the situations change. These headquarters will lean forward to support combatant commanders, working through the Army Service Component Command, as indicators and warnings of instability emerge. An example of this is the 1st Armored Division (1AD) as briefly described above. It deployed to Jordan as part of the joint exercise Eager Lion, having already coordinated with Central Command to understand the worsening crisis in Syria. From there, a tactical command post remained in Jordan to assist the Jordanians and other partners with a wide range of activities resulting from the mass humanitarian crisis to the north.
- **Brigades and enabler units.** For FY13, units below division are assigned, allocated, or service retained, aligned in varying strengths to geographic combatant commands, and to the Global Response Force. 2-11D Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), now allocated to the United States Africa Command, is the first brigade allocated in this manner. Since March 2013, they have conducted approximately 79 missions in more than 30 countries (as of mid-September 2013).

### *Training*

The Army will adopt a revised ARFORGEN cycle based on a 24-month Active Component and 60-month Reserve Component sequence. It will cover Reset, Train, Ready (year 1) and Available (year 2). Training policy is to focus on achieving baseline proficiency of T1 level through decisive action training, involving unit maneuver preparation at the Army Combat Training Centers. Fiscal constraints may limit full implementation of that policy. However, all regionally aligned forces will be trained, prior to deployment, to the readiness level required by the combatant commander. Soldiers' baseline training will be supplemented, where necessary, by combatant commander-specified skill acquisition for their assigned missions. This additional training is subdivided into two components to enhance the US Army's ability to work with partners:

- Mission-specific training will be articulated by Army Service Component Commands (based on combatant command requirements) and organized through FORSCOM. Cultural and regional expertise and language awareness training will be conducted at home station throughout the training year and the year of availability, and be supervised by the division/brigade HQs. Other Army institutional and training capabilities will support as required. The 162nd Infantry Brigade, now focused on Security Force Assistance (SFA) training, will provide much of the support in the short-term. Future training support will come from regionally aligned formation headquarters and retained advise and assist expertise. As an example, Armored Brigade Combat Team “Dagger” 11D soldiers received specialized language, regional expertise, and cultural training at their home station in April 2012. This special cultural and regional orientation was known as “Dagger University.” Using Africa-born forces from within the brigade, African Studies students from nearby Kansas State University, and the 162nd Infantry Brigade from Fort Polk, Louisiana, the week-long training introduced cultural and linguist information specific to the regions of Africa where the soldiers would most likely work. Based on insights provided by the Africa-born 2nd ABCT Soldiers, as well as the Kansas State University African Studies students, Dagger University provided forces the knowledge they needed to accomplish complex mission sets.

### *Austere Environments*

The Army’s deployment experience over the past 12 years focused on units deploying into a priority theater and then falling in on established Forward Operating Bases, some more austere than others, for a set period of time. As we focus on the challenges of operating around the globe in support of the national security strategy, which projects more balanced global support, Army units will develop an expeditionary mindset to ensure they are equipped to train and operate in remote, minimally supported environments. As a result, personnel should be prepared for change to what has been the norm in recent years. The deployment cycle will change from the current 6-12 months with a Brigade formation to a more cyclic tempo of deployments that will be episodic, lasting anywhere from one week to several months, and employing units, teams, and in some cases, individuals. Living conditions and theater-specific equipment and force protection (FP) measures will all be vastly different from the norm. The role of the combatant command and Army Service Component Command in providing basic life support and sustainment will be critical to the success of these deployments.

As an example, recent events in Mali significantly increased Africa Command’s requirements for Army support to the Department of State Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI)-funded training for partner nation security forces. Army Regionally Aligned Forces from 1-18 IN deployed a 22-person multifunctional training team to Oullam, Niger, on 27 May 2013 to help mentor and train a Nigerian Defense Force for deployment to Mali as part of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali missions. Through interagency collaboration with the Chief of Mission and the Department of State, US Army personnel were accompanied by seven PAE contractors to execute the training

mission. As a multinational dimension, French Army trainers provided tailored training on certain military capabilities; specifically artillery systems. Both the scale (22 people) and the duration (about 10 weeks) of the deployment are indicative of the new operating environment that confronts combatant commands. While conditions on the ground were austere and reflected the harsh nature of the environment, this mission proved popular as junior leaders were empowered to command. The relative short duration of the mission was popular with a cohort that has grown used to, and weary of, 12-month deployments. For many, the fact that they are operating in a different country with unique cultural characteristics and fresh challenges has energized them and provided a much needed operational and training focus.

### **Is the RAF Affordable?**

Given these extraordinary fiscal times, the question of affordability is a good one and the Army continues to balance requirements inside its Operations and Maintenance (O&M) budget with most likely and most dangerous missions. While the institution has seen an increase in demand from combatant commanders, much of this demand is paid for by other parties. But there is no real possibility of it “collapsing under its own weight.” Already in the first year of regionally aligned forces execution, the Army has realized numerous efficiencies by being able to identify when to send squads rather than platoons. This agility will only increase over time.

Some of the direct costs associated with RAF are based on future training strategy, which includes readiness, language training, and the future viability of some training platforms. Costs linked to the actual implementation of regional alignment mostly will come from Title 22, Combatant Commander funds, joint exercise funds, and special authorities, such as the Global Security Contingency Fund. In fact, the initial alignment of 2/1 infantry brigade demonstrated that there are authorities and funding available for more effective and efficient alignment of execution capabilities. With regard to the use of regionally aligned forces in the traditional Title 10 sense where the Army foots the bill, HQDA has noted a 25 percent increase in the FY15 Program Objective Memorandum for security cooperation activities. Some of this is due to the increased availability of US forces to assist combatant commanders for their Theater Campaign Plans. This will require financial offset from elsewhere within the Army budget and the Army is analyzing the feasibility of this.

Nonetheless, the services—the Army especially—have to make tough choices in readying forces for a full range of military operations, from humanitarian assistance in the Pacific, to the crisis response requirements of “new normal” in Northern Africa, to major combat operations in the Middle East or North Korea. The Army has to be ready for each of these missions, yet it stays busy every day with keeping theaters set with intelligence, communications, and logistics architecture, supporting counterterrorism activities, and with military engagement with partners across the globe. The funding for both the readiness and some of the activity itself comes from the Army’s top line, its Operations and Maintenance dollars. Balancing readiness for the most likely and most dangerous courses of action has never been more difficult. Meeting

combatant commanders' specific day-to-day needs potentially requires a lower level of collective training than do major combat operations, yet those same forces must be ready for the toughest fight, particularly as the total number available for that fight decreases.

### **Conclusion: Business Not as Usual**

Regional alignment will take approximately five years to implement fully. The effects of the reduced budget and the pace of drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan are the key constraints to quicker progress. However, as the concept matures through FY14, the Army's focus on regional alignment will increase across all combatant commands, to include increasing support to and integration with US Special Operations Command. For soldiers, RAF means real-world missions in exciting places. For policymakers and strategists, RAF means a more agile, responsive, integrated Army. To combatant commanders, RAF means many of the Army's capabilities in the continental United States have, in effect, become a part of their areas of responsibility. And for America's role as a global leader, RAF offers a very real mechanism to shape the operational environment, on the land and among humans, more consistently and in conjunction with a range of strategic partners.

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